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BULLETIN
OF THE AMERICAN ART-UNION.



NEW-YORK, JUNE 1, 1851.

THE ART OF SKETCHING FROM NATURE.

In the JULY number of this Journal we shall commence the publication of a valuable English treatise on this subject, illustrated by engravings on wood. The principles of perspective, and of linear sketching, are explained in this work in a clear and intelligible manner. It will probably be continued through two or three of the succeeding numbers, and it would be advisable for all who intend to subscribe to the Art-Union, to do so at once, in order to obtain the Bulletin, and thus secure this treatise complete.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS.

The principal Illustration of this number is a *Stable Scene*, designed and engraved in mezzotint by WENDEROTH. The woodcuts are by BOBBETT & EDMONDS, from ROSSITER'S *Types of Beauty*, and DURAND'S *Kaaterskill Clove*, two of the principal ornaments of the present Exhibition of the Academy of Design.

J. M. W. TURNER.

Unpopularity must ever be a test of the greatness of the artist, and it may safely be said, that no great work of art was ever at once appreciated by the many. If there have been any seeming exceptions, they may be resolved into cases where the popularity was owing to some minor quality of the work; and where deference to an acknowledged authority has produced a general assent to its decision. To the latter cause, may be assigned the popularity of those great artists, who have received in their own lives, that universal homage, which, more than any thing else, compensates for early neglect and hardship. The reason for this want of appreciation, must be evident to one who understands the rare qualifications, the union of which, is necessary to constitute the great artist. Art is a system of philosophy requiring the most profound research to comprehend its principles. There is no instinctive perception of its deeper truths, nor can they be received by the art-student, without some portion of that patient investigation which makes the life-labor of the artist. It is necessary to an entire appreciation of a work of art, that one should be possessed in some small degree of a feeling like the artist's, and the more rare and elevated that feeling, the fewer will be his appreciative admirers.

Turner is no exception to the rule above advanced, though it may be true that his reputation is world-wide. If an intelligent admiration is necessary to popularity, then is Turner not

popular, even in England, though the enthusiasm and force of those who do feel his merits, have so overpowered the common opinion, that it has become a heresy to cavil at his greatness.

There have been two periods in his life, each equal in duration to, and greater in results than, the lives of most great artists. In the second, he has lingered long enough to hear the homage paid by the multitude to the results of the first—twenty years hence, they may acknowledge his present merit, as they now do his past. It is the former Turner whom England admires, and not the artist who, still firm and clear in intellect and aim, gives to the world now the glory and beauty which the study, during so many years, of the splendors of heaven and earth, of sky and sea, of rainbow and setting sun, has kindled in his own poetic mind.

Turner possesses all the requisites which are demanded in the constitution of an artist, combined to an extent the world has probably never seen in any other man. Whether it be as a colorist, a draughtsman, a philosopher, or a poet, he is equal to, or greater than any one who previous to him had made art his study. In imaginative power, the greatest artistic faculty, he has no superior. In the first period, he exhibited only those of his peculiar talents which were most easily understood. His fine feeling for form, earnest study of nature, and his poetic sensibilities, are there shown. In the later period, he developed his power as a colorist, and called up his great imagination, which has marked him as one of the Poets of all time.

His pictures are always distinguished by the most earnest eclecticism, a conscientious selection of those points which he deemed most worthy of his thought, and the unhesitating sacrifice, as far as necessary, of all other attractions to this. Space and form seem to have been the objects at which he principally aimed in his early pictures, and they are painted in quiet gray, and carefully elaborated, luminous, but not showing the passionate feeling for light which his later pictures exhibit. The *Greenwich*, in his own gallery, is, I believe, one of his earliest, and is characterized by nothing so strongly, as its studiousness, and unaffectedness, and fine expression of distance. It is a simple transcript of nature, apparently painted on the spot, and showing none of his beauty of composition. It was his practice, at this time, to paint much from nature, as indeed it has always been, to a greater or less extent. He shows, at this time, no impatience at the restraining of the greatness he must have been conscious of, by the rigid discipline of study to which he subjected himself, and his works exhibit no token to the ordinary observer of the great power he afterwards manifested. Few of those who watched his progress at that time, could have dreamed that in that patient, unpretending painter, was concealed the greatest landscape painter of the world. A weaker man would have rushed as soon as possible, into the more attractive and less tedious exercise of his imaginative powers, neglecting the study necessary to perfect those powers, and Danby-like, would have been lost in conventional weaknesses, merging all imagination in a fancy diseased for want of its proper aliment. There is nothing more instructive to the young artist, than this period in the life of the great man, when, patiently abiding the time when the powers he

knew he possessed, should burst ripened on the world, he confined himself to the unattractive part of his studies; the elementary knowledge of his art. Cramped by poverty and neglect, though he must have felt that he could at once have attracted attention and favor, by even the imperfect development of his higher abilities, he struggled on, supporting himself sometimes by teaching; practising the most rigid economy, and animated by that sublime self-confidence which marks the hero. There seems to have been a singular veneration in Turner's mind for the early landscape painters, Claude, and Poussin, and for the later Wilson; and it may safely be said, he gathered all the good their works offered, and received little of the injury their mannerisms and falsities generally carry with them. When he began to grasp the higher principles of art, he did it with a mind sufficiently well informed in the philosophy and fact of nature to make the illustration of them interesting from the truth and beauty woven into it, and thus he followed, not in servile imitation each of the early masters, or combined their peculiar beauties into a "style" still more attractive; yet doing all this with that fulness of knowledge which gave those seeming imitations the freshness of new revelations. Claude was then the mould to which all artists endeavored to shape themselves, and they were accounted the most successful who imitated him most closely. It was to be expected that Turner would be to some extent influenced by the prevailing taste, more especially, as the beauties of Claude are those which appeal to the poetic feelings which were so strong in Turner. From simple views, and unambitious exercise of his powers, he came to an emulation—it cannot be called an imitation—of Claude's works, and produced many classical compositions, of which several now remain in his gallery. At what period of his life these were produced, I cannot say; but by the evidences of great vigor of mind, shown in the size, and handling of the pictures, they appear to be the works of his maturity.* The finest examples of his Claude-compositions, in his gallery, are the *Building of Carthage*, and the *Crossing the Brook*—the former, the perfection of Claude's sea-port, as the latter is of his landscape. The *Crossing the Brook* fails in the quality of air, and in the coolness, and so to speak, holiness of color which Claude would have given it; less, I suppose, because of inability to render it, than because he knew that though beautiful and expressive, it was conventional, and did not belong to nature; and Turner has never taken a suggestion from any one, that his knowledge of nature did not warrant and assure him to be correct. Its sky is English—one of those mist-filled, luminous skies, in which the cumuli are piling sluggishly up, wasting away and mingling themselves into the vapor which grays the blue sky in the light of the noonday sun. It is a magnificent picture, and enough of itself to make the fame of its producer. As compositions, the best pictures that Claude ever produced look forced and artificial, compared to its refinement of form and lofty feeling. He also used a style in which were mingled many of the characteristics of Poussin and Wilson. To how great an extent

* I do not mean to say that large pictures are always indicative of great power—the practice of some of our younger artists would make such an assertion an absurdity; but large pictures well-managed are.

he indulged in this form of expression, I do not know. I have seen but one picture of this class—the *Trosachs*, in the possession of Mr. Grun-dy, a simple, earnest expression of mountain scenery, and showing very great knowledge of the resources of art, though far inferior to those pictures where he emulated only himself. Specimens of the various modifications of his manner would be exceedingly interesting, collected together. They would hardly be credited as belonging to the same artist's works, so varied and universal is their aim.

His love of truth soon freed him from the restraint of the classical ideal of landscape, and his compositions became more natural, and bearing more the semblance of views, though occasionally introducing an idea from Claude, but so disguised in its new garments, as to be scarcely recognizable as such. His color lost its conventional grey, and became more the true expression of the varied tints of nature; and his power as a colorist began to show itself, in the management of the atmospheric greys, which he now produced exquisitely. His aerial perspective was remarkable. Sir Thomas Lawrence said of one of his pictures, produced about this time, that "it seemed as if you could throw a stone into it, and it would not touch the canvas." All who have seen them, must remember with delight the marines, produced about or previous to this time, which, though so far as I have seen, lacking the refinement of composition shown in his landscapes, are such remarkable expressions of the force and transparency of water, and so carefully studied in wave-form, as to justify Rurkin's assertion, that he is the only man who has ever given the force of water in agitation. There are several pictures in the artist's possession, though not in his gallery, which show these traits very finely. The *Pas de Calais* is well known, I suppose, among those who have studied his works. A single wave crosses the picture. The water is broadly handled, and with that exquisite truth that one feels the surface to be no polished substance, as generally in Stanfield, and most of the English water painters, but only as the bound, or limit, as it were, of the heaving, restless, penetrable fluid that you feel to be fathoms deep, and through which, were it not for the too great depth, you would try to see the bottom. Perhaps the finest picture of this class, is one in the possession of the Duke of Bridgewater—a "*Wreck*," which many of his admirers consider his grandest conception, and which is certainly in its wave-forms, and the motion of the mad-dened sea, most sublime. But there is a partiality of aim in most of the marines of this period, a dryness, and painty quality in the skies, the result, however, of very noble eclectic feeling, which makes that portion comparatively disagreeable, and enfeebles the impression of the whole to most persons. In the water-colors of this time, no such fault can be found; and a large drawing in the possession of B. G. Windus, Esq., in which a heavy ground-swell runs nearly through the picture, with magnificent masses of the "scud" cloud floating over the pale-green sky, is one of the most pleasing pieces of quiet color I have ever seen.

With the change in Mr. Turner's style, of which I have before spoken, came his unpopularity. The transition of his manner is marked by the *Bay of Baiae*, in his own gallery,

a noble picture, showing the change of his system of color, by the golden hues of the foreground, and the glow of the sunlight in it. With this change came the full measure of his unpopularity, which was so great that not only himself and his pictures were ridiculed to the greatest extent, but it is said even those who purchased them. When a well-known amateur of London bought one of his Italian pictures, painted during this season of unpopularity, a member of the Royal Academy wrote to him, expressing admiration of his courage as well as of his taste.

He had been hitherto content to paint in a style which, while it satisfied his own feeling, in a great measure, yet did not shock the prejudices of the public, by introducing any innovations that required study to comprehend. Then came the expression of his strong feeling for light, and to this feeling, I think, may be ascribed the system of color which is peculiarly his own. His pictures were high-toned, he often using nearly pure white, in considerable masses, particularly in the architectural subjects, and the sky being often filled with masses of white cirri. His tints, losing their quiet gray, glowed as though bidding defiance to the weakness of the palette; and in order to increase this brilliancy still more, he heightened it by the well studied opposition and management of which he is so great a master. So wonderfully managed are some of his sunlight effects, that the eye is confused in looking at them. I was told by a very eminent English artist, that on looking at the sun in the *Bridge of Caligula*, and then turning his eyes to a white ground, there was an impression left on the retina as if by a luminous body. This picture is probably one of the finest instances of his combination of the oppositions of light and shade, and color, and was painted about twenty years ago, at the same time with a sunset, now in the possession of Mr. Lennox of this city—a very fine picture, and one of the most carefully "made out" of that period. The public now talked of the time when Turner's pictures were truly great, as though he had lost his power; and as though the mind, which for so many years had worshipped nature in its most hidden and glorious temples, and which still preserved its strength and loftiness of purpose unchanged, would stoop to perpetuate frivolities and absurdities. It would be supposed that the man who had interpreted truly and faithfully the teachings of nature, so far as ordinary minds had gone, or could go, without the guiding light of genius, would have been still reverenced and followed, when leading into new, and as yet, uncomprehended truths. But when his pictures could no longer be measured by the comprehension of untaught minds, when he began to free himself from the material, and summon men to go with him into the ideal—into the spirituality of art, the result was what it always has been in such cases. He was left with few admirers, and with each successive advance the number was limited. They found no longer the realization they had admired, and were unable to understand his imaginative suggestion of the truth and knowledge which his mind poured out, impatient of the delay of elaboration; and so, either too trifling or too slothful to bestow the study necessary to comprehend him, they turned their backs on him. Fortunately for Turner and for the world, he was not com-

elled by circumstances to bend to the public taste. He had accumulated enough, chiefly by his drawings and engravings, and by economy, to free him from dependence on patronage for his support, and was thus enabled to follow his own inclinations, often indulging in the vagaries and freaks of his imagination. His handling showed that vigor and decision, and his methods that incomprehensibility, which more than any other human work seem allied to the creative power.

His pictures at this time were often so little elaborated, as to be hardly understood without close study, though there are very few in which the intention and meaning were not discoverable by a tithe of the study necessary to produce them. Occasionally he painted a picture which seemed intended to prove that his powers were unwakened, as the *Old Temeraire*, which was painted after ten years' decline, the '*Slaver*,' and some of the finest of his *Venices*. I do not know at what time the *Juliet and her Nurse* was painted, but probably earlier than those I have mentioned. It is the only true expression of moonlight I have ever seen, and it is remarkable as employing the full power of his palette, and not dependent in any measure on the obscurity of execution and blackness of pigment for its effect, but rather on the most faithful rendering of the color, and the less palpable phenomena of moonlight, than the round white wafer that painters generally employ to symbolize, apparently, the kind of light they intend us to find in the picture. The moon is out of sight, and its light is mingled with the blaze of fire-works from the Piazzetta, and the boats on the Grand Canal, conditions which none but Turner would have dared to attempt, but which by him are successfully attempted. But it is in the later pictures that the greatness of his mind is shown more than in all others, and that partly because in them is seen an intense spirituality as well as the inability of years to weaken his power. It has been said of his pictures that they possess a vitality, and it seems to me that if this expression be a good one, his later pictures may be called expressions of the principles of this vitality, of the abstract spirit of nature, (and in this sense I use the word spiritual as applied to them). They are grand and glorious embodiments of light, space, color, and those higher attributes of nature which Turner above all others has felt and attempted to convey, clothed in just so much of materiality as would serve to give them form and tangibility, and render them beautiful as compositions. It seems to me that the world's art contains no higher aim—no greater results than these. Here he has led you into the mystery of mysteries. Here has he developed those formulas, the application of which to the material constitutes all of the multiplied forms of higher beauty of which landscape is susceptible. Do you want light? it blazes out from his canvas—color? it glows there as it never did elsewhere—space and air? they are magnificently rendered in all his pictures, but in none as in his later ones. Yet from all this beauty men turn with disdain, because they can find no sticks or stones which look as if they might be gathered up—no little bits that seem what they are not. As pieces of execution these pictures are the most perfect triumphs over the weakness and imperfection of the material that art can show. It cannot be too much regretted that their triumph is so

short-lived, and that their colors change, for some reason, very soon. Turner has now passed his culminating point. In composition and the management of cool color, as well as in the vigorous tone of his mind, he is as great as ever, but his eye for warm color is failing him, and occasionally the warm passages look muddy. But the only wonder is that he should have retained his powers so well under the weight of nearly eighty years.

It is by his water-colors that Turner will be most favorably known to the generality of the admirers of art. They are the perfection of that branch of painting, and of themselves are enough to place him at the head of landscape art. It is mainly those that the author of "Modern Painters" instances, in the chapters on Truth. They are almost entirely views or subjects for engraving; but though they contain the results of his study of nature in a much more comprehensible form than his pictures, and are right and perfect as far as they go, they do not contain his greatest faculties. All his great compositions and subjects, involving the subtler principles of art, and above all, those expressing his intense imaginative power, are in oil. Of this latter class, and combining all the conditions, is the *Slaver*. The awful majesty of the passing storm, the mighty sweep of the long lines of the waves, and the struggling of the slaves, sinking manacled to death, give it a power that stamps its recollection indelibly on the mind of one who will study it, even no longer than to understand its most evident qualities. In imaginative power Turner stands alone among modern artists, but the world cannot be blamed for not recognizing this his great faculty; but there are beauties that all may understand, and there are none so mentally dull that they may not cultivate and increase their knowledge of him. It is hardly to be hoped that we shall ever see many of his works in this country, but we might cultivate a profitable acquaintance with him through his engravings, to which all may have access to a greater or less extent. His pictures seem always designed in reference to white and black, or the reproduction through engravings; and they retain, when thus translated, much of the brilliancy and the beautifully balanced light and shade of the originals. Of the illustrated works, the *England and Wales* is probably one of the finest; but this as well as the *Liber Studiorum* is rare, owing to the retention by the artist of the copyright and a large part of the issues, which he manifests no wish to dispose of. The subscription-price of the former was twelve guineas, though it cannot be procured now for that price. Turner has repeatedly refused to sell copies, saying that the public once had them at their disposal, and having neglected to avail themselves of the opportunity, it was their own fault that they did not have them. The subscription-price of the *Liber Studiorum* I do not know; it is now held at from fifteen to twenty guineas. The plates of this are mezzotint, if I recollect right, and etched by Turner himself, some few being also finished by him. His engravings are very numerous, and some of them very costly. He published at his own expense a series of five, which are the finest I have seen. They are from choice pictures, viz.: *Crossing the Brook*, *Mercury and Herse*, *Dido and Aeneas*, *Juliet and her Nurse*, and the *Caligula's Bridge*. Impressions are worth

from five to twelve guineas, according to date. Of the value of his pictures we have heard much. He has been offered £5,000 each for the *Carthage* and *Old Temeraire*, besides an open offer of any sum for the latter, £3,000 for the *Crossing the Brook*, and similarly for others. He has in his own possession many of his finest pictures, which he cannot be prevailed on to part with. They have been once offered to the public, and being withdrawn, cannot now be purchased at any price. The *Old Temeraire* was in the exhibition at £250, and found no purchaser. The *Slaver* was sold for very little more, and all admirers of Turner will be pleased to know that it is in the possession of Mr. Ruskin, the author of *Modern Painters*.

As a man, Turner has not been spared the abuse which has been heaped upon him as an artist. He is represented as miserly, misanthropic, and coarse in manners. If he were, there are good reasons, reasoning as men do, why he should be so. It is hardly to be expected that one who had been compelled in early life to live in the most rigid economy, should ever entirely recover from the habits which his necessities engendered. Avaricious he is not—there are many instances of his princely generosity; but the herd of those who cavil at his greatness can hardly be expected to give circulation to facts which would prove the greatness of his heart as well as of his intellect. The world is full of the relations of his avarice, mostly fabrications, all misrepresentations, such, for instance, as his charging for the carriage of a picture, &c., but I have never heard an authenticated instance, in which the act was not a retaliation for some similar act in the other party. There is no better proof of the falseness of such imputations than his own sensitiveness to them. The man who would calculatingly subject himself to the certainty of such charges, must be past feeling pain from hearing them. Misanthropic he is not; and it is one of the highest proofs of the healthy tone of his mind, that he has passed through all the persecution that has been heaped upon him, without becoming bitter and morose toward society. None but those who have come in contact with him, under the annoyance of the bores who infest the presence of greatness, could have received such an impression. Young painters who, vain of their own little greatness, have had their advances met by blunt but probably well deserved rebukes; or those who have undertaken to add to their importance by the honor of his acquaintance, and have been treated with unceremonious repulse, will, of course, have much to say of his bearishness. But I doubt if any one who approached him in the proper spirit, and under proper circumstances, was ever met in any other than the kindest way. There is no man among the artists of England so beloved by his associates; and those who have had the pleasure of meeting him where he was free from the annoyances of care and social irritaments, will carry with them, in the recollection of his genial smile and unaffected cordiality, an impression of any thing but misanthropy.

As an illustration of his indifference to money-getting, I may mention a circumstance related to me by an intimate friend of Mr. Turner's. Several of his old friends and admirers had subscribed a sum of money for the purchase of his *Building of Carthage*, for presentation to the National Gallery, and made him an offer, through

his agent, of £5,000 for the picture, stating the object of its purchase. Turner, after considering the offer a day or two, replied, acknowledging the honor shown him, but so strong was his attachment to the picture that he could not part with it, even on the terms mentioned; "but," he added, "if I die to-morrow, the picture is the nation's." Many instances might be given of noble, generous feeling, and munificent deeds, but they were accompanied by the unostentatious feeling of true benevolence, and the world has never heard of them. Good travels slowly, while all the evil envy and malice have set afloat has travelled wherever his name has been heard. Most of the stories told of Turner are utterly without foundation, so that one is at a loss to assign a motive for their origin.

As an example of Turner's quickness of perception, the following anecdote is told by Creswick, the English landscape painter. In the exhibition of the Royal Academy, a few years since, Creswick had a picture—a *Squally Day*. Near the centre of the landscape was a white horse, forming rather a conspicuous object. On the varnishing day, one of the academicians advised him to paint out the horse, and a difference arose with regard to it, when it was agreed to refer the point to Mr. Turner, who was in another room, and had only once walked hastily through the room in which the picture was, making it impossible for him to have given it more than a passing glance. He replied, without going into the room, "Keep it in." "But," said they, "something is wrong." "Well," said Turner, "you have got him turned the wrong way"—and on seeing the picture they discovered that the horse had turned his head towards the storm instead of his tail, as he should have done.

In personal appearance Turner is not striking. He is of little stature, and slightly inclined to the portly. He was, when I saw him, nearly eighty, but hardly seemed more than sixty-five. His step was firm, and his eye clear and keen as a hawk's; his expression, pleasant and rather humorous. He seems to retain his powers of enjoyment as well as his intellectual faculties, undiminished, and, no doubt, might, much longer, would he be persuaded to leave off painting, which he positively refuses to do. He will have, contrary to all expectation, several pictures in the exhibition of the Royal Academy this spring.* But he is now in his old age, and we may expect to hear, ere long, of his cessation from labor in the rest of death; but whether he die soon or late, he will be lamented as few living men will be. He has given this age a boon that men will only properly estimate when art has assumed the position it merits, as the sublime study; the perfection of all philosophy. Then will due honor be given to him as the great artist of the age, and whatever other men may do, it is hardly possible that any thing will be done to supersede the revelations of the Eternal Beauty which he has given us. Those who love him will be thankful that he has received in life some portion of the honor the world generally bestows on the dead alone.

W.

* Since the above was written, accounts of the present Exhibition of the Royal Academy have been received, by which it appears that the anticipations of the writer on this point have not been realized. He received his information, however, from the best authority, Mr. Turner's agent. It was undoubtedly the Artists' intention to exhibit, and his failure to do so was probably owing to a late severe fit of illness.